

ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

FROM:

Director, Foreign Broadcast
Information Service

EXTENSION

NO.

FBIS-0106/85

STAT

DATE

14 March 1985

STAT

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and
building)

DATE

RECEIVED

FORWARDED

OFFICER'S
INITIALSCOMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom
to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)1. Deputy Director for
Science and Technology

2. Room 6E45, Headquarters

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Evan:

Attached is a brief rundown
on how FBIS bureaus and our Wire
Service handled the Chernenko
death and Gorbachev succession.

D/FBIS

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LOGNOTE -- Deputy Chief, Wire Services Staff/DRD, 12 March 1985

(Hughes) CHERNENKO DEATH, GORBACHEV SUCCESSION -- The abnormal Soviet media behavior usually associated with the death of a Soviet leader was first noted on Sunday, 10 March when LD Bureau reported that Moscow Domestic Service first program at 2230 GMT (5:30 p.m. local) had replaced a scheduled concert for rural workers with a program of "serious classical music." Soon afterward, LD added that Moscow World Service and Moscow in English to North America at 2300 GMT had begun playing "somber music between their regular features" and that Moscow Domestic Service second program had replaced its normal comedy feature with a classical music program. Following these reports, which were relayed immediately to the Ops Center, SOVA, State INR and Ops, and the White House Situation Room, the Wire asked LD and OW to resume the series of comprehensive media behavior FYI's which the bureaus had suspended following a Chernenko "death alert" on Friday, 8 March.

During the next 12 hours, classical music continued to dominate programming on Moscow Domestic Service first and second programs and on the four Orbita relays of Moscow radio monitored at LD bureau. Fewer abnormalities were observed on the Moscow Television first program monitored at LD, although this transmitter signed off at 2155 GMT without carrying a scheduled "gypsy music" program and without providing a preview for 11 March viewing. It was not until Moscow TV first program signed on again at 0500 GMT (12 a.m. local) on 11 March that significant changes in television programming appeared, the first of which was the replacement of a scheduled soccer match by a documentary on Kazakhstan. The announcers on the Vremya newscast preceding the Kazakhstan documentary did not appear in anything approaching mourning dress; one announcer wore a "dark gray suit over a very bright red shirt with a large prominent collar." OW's coverage of Moscow TV Orbita-2 broadcasts first revealed an alteration to published schedules at 0608 GMT when a documentary on the Yenisey River preempted a basketball game.

TASS English and Russian circuits apparently behaved normally throughout this period.

From Sunday evening until Chernenko's death was officially announced at 1100 GMT (6 a.m. local) on Monday, the Wire filed nine media behavior reports based on LD and OW FYI's and fielded numerous phone calls from Wire consumers concerning media reports and behavior. The Wire was in particularly close contact with the Ops Center, State INR, and the White House Situation Room, all of which requested phone alerts when the Wire received new information on Soviet media behavior.

The bureaus' flash filing of Western and Soviet source reports on Chernenko's death was prompt and free of factual errors. The first Wire bulletin was run at 0515 GMT when KYODO, citing the "Soviet source" of an ABC correspondent in Moscow, reported that Chernenko had

died (as this was reported almost simultaneously by ABC television locally on a special extended 'Nightline' program, and by REUTER and AP, the Ops Center advised against a CRITIC message and none was issued). OW and NC followed this with KYODO and AFP reports that an "official announcement" would be carried by TASS at 0930 GMT.

The first Wire CRITIC was issued at 0848 GMT when Paris AFP reported that the CPSU Central Committee had announced Chernenko's death, according to an "unimpeachable source." NSA initiated a NOIWON conference call based on this report. The 0930 GMT deadline for a TASS announcement on Chernenko's death reported earlier by KYODO and AFP passed without any Soviet source confirmation and it was not until 1100 GMT, with the simultaneous announcement by Moscow radio and television (and a flurry of identical AFP reports from three separate bureaus), that the Wire issued its next CRITIC's. The Moscow radio and TV reports were followed in quick succession by the TASS announcement that Gorbachev would head the funeral commission (the final CRITIC), the official Soviet obituary and medical report, the address to the people and party by the CPSU Central Committee and Supreme Soviet Presidium, and the appointment of Gorbachev as general secretary, all of which were run as Wire bulletins.

The MIDAS system performed well throughout the crisis coverage and required no manual intervention to handle the 114 ZZ messages (and a significantly greater number of OO-precedence reports) that were filed between 0800 and 1300 GMT. I would hasten to add, however, that the bulk of this flash traffic arrived during non-peak hours, that is, when the Wire was not competing with the Daily Report for the system's attention. In addition, while the Wire experienced no "mechanical" difficulties with MIDAS, the sheer volume of flash and OO messages posed a notable operational problem for the slot editor since these messages had to be acknowledged individually before they could be transmitted or discarded. This is not so much a MIDAS problem as it is a case of the bureaus duplicating each other, particularly from AFP beams. As a result of this experience, I would suggest that the standing instruction to the field which calls for all AFP bureaus to file flash traffic be modified somewhat, and that geographical divisions for flash filing be instituted.

cc: B/FBIS, C/Ops, AC/DRD, C/MOD, C/AG, C/LRB, C/WSS)